

IX.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

WE have received the following letters addressed "To the Editors of 'The Ibis'" :—

SIRS,—It is an established fact that the red colouring matter in the feathers of the Bearded Vulture, *Gypæëtus barbatus*, and also the colouring on its eggs, are due to superficial deposits of oxide of iron, but how the oxide gets there is still, I understand, a moot point. As regards the stains on the feathers, two theories have been advanced: it has been suggested that these may be due to the fact (*a*) that the birds bathe in ferruginous streams, or (*b*) that the iron is derived from the birds' blood. Hume was inclined to think that it was the latter ('Rough Notes,' pp. 45-46), as he emphatically states that the Lammergeyer is a very dirty bird, and *never* washes. For the last twenty years or so I have been closely attending to the habits of this bird, and have hitherto always been under the impression that it neither bathes, nor drinks water. It may, therefore, be of interest to some readers of your Journal to know that while out searching for nests of this species in a lonely mountain-glen in the Koti State, close to Simla, I came across a spot to which the Lammergeyers apparently habitually resort, not only to drink, but also to bathe. One of my native hunters had often assured me that he had frequently seen these birds, and also *Gyps himalayensis*, bathing, but up to this time I had refused to believe him. To-day (the 29th October, 1911) he exultingly drew my attention to this fact.

The spot selected by these Lammergeyers for drinking and bathing was at the bottom of a small waterfall, and during the course of a couple of hours or so I noticed no less than four of them follow each other in quick succession, and without any hesitation fly straight to this place. Three of them drank and the fourth had a bath.

When drinking, the birds sat on a prominent stone which projected out from the middle of the water, and always took frequent and long draughts. The bird which took a bath alighted at first close to the edge of the stream, then walked slowly into it, and dipped its head several times in the water and splashed about with its wings. After a short time it walked back to the edge of the stream, preened its feathers a little, spread out its wings—apparently to dry them, and then took another dip. This was repeated several times, and the bath lasted for from ten to fifteen minutes.

I had no bottle or other vessel with me, and was therefore unable to bring away any of the water from this stream with a view to getting it analysed, as it would have been interesting to know for certain whether it contained any iron in solution or not. The next time that I happen to visit this spot I shall not forget to bring away some of the water.

I see that Captain F. E. S. Adair, in his book ‘A Summer in High Asia’ (p. 222), mentions having shot a Lammergeyer close to the Tagalang Pass, in Ladakh, when it was “drinking water at a stream.”

It seems significant that in confinement the Bearded Vulture loses, or does not acquire, its tawny tint. Would it be possible to acquire this colouring matter on its feathers from mud-baths? I throw out this suggestion, because two or three years ago I noticed a Lammergeyer indulging in a bath of this nature on the ledge of a precipice. The bath lasted for about five minutes, and at the end of it the bird shook its feathers, raising a thick cloud of dust, just as a fowl does. The late Dr. Adams appears also to have noticed these birds indulging in such baths, for he says: “A red or cinnamon-coloured powder is plentifully distributed among the feathers of the neck and breast of young and adult individuals, and would seem to be composed of soil containing iron, which they obtain from dusting themselves like other birds—a habit much indulged in by the

denizens of bare rocky mountains, from the bear and ibex down to the mountain finch.”

I am, Sirs,

Yours, &c.,

P. T. L. DODSWORTH.

‘Carlton Grove.’

Simla, S.W. (Punjab), India.

November 2nd, 1911.

SIRS,—In reference to the last paragraph on p. 770, ‘Ibis,’ vol. v. no. 20, may we point out that the Migration Committee of the British Ornithological Club have recorded the occurrences of the nocturnal visitors at St. Catherine’s Lighthouse and at most of the other Lighthouses and light-vessels round the English and Welsh coasts for the last five years, and the accounts of these records will be found in the special reports published every year in the ‘Bulletin of the British Ornithological Club.’

We are, Sirs,

Yours, &c.,

THE B. O. C. MIGRATION COMMITTEE.

[What the Migration Committee states is quite correct, and we regret that there should have been any misunderstanding on the subject. But under the present system the occurrences of birds at St. Catherine’s Lighthouse are mixed up with those at the other Light-Stations and have to be picked out by those who wish to study them. Besides, only the autumnal occurrences are given. We still think that a complete list of *all* the occurrences at some of the principal lighthouses might be occasionally useful.—EDD.]

SIRS,—I wish to call the attention of Ornithologists to a recent number of the ‘Condor’ (vol. xiii. 1911, no. 4) in which Mr. Love Miller has given (p. 58) a short synopsis of our knowledge of the fossil birds of the Pacific coast of North America. The author refers especially to the bird-remains found in the remarkable asphalt-bed of Rancho la-Brea in

California. This peculiar deposit, which is of Quaternary age, contains remains of a very large number of mammals, many extinct (*e. g.* Sabre-toed Tiger, Mastodons, Great Ground-Slots), and birds. Most of the birds belong to genera still existing, though in some cases not in the same district. One remarkable characteristic is the preponderance of the remains of predatory birds, especially of those feeding on carrion, and it has been suggested that this may be accounted for by supposing that these birds, in feeding on the dead and dying mammals caught in the asphalt deposits, were frequently involved themselves in the sticky mass. The most notable of these predatory forms is *Teratornis merriami*, representing a new genus and species, probably most nearly related to the Cathartidæ, but at the same time shewing some characters approximating to those of the Falconidæ, and even of the Serpentariidæ. In fact, this peculiar species will probably have to be referred to a new family.

From the same deposit representatives of several genera, especially interesting from the point of view of geographical distribution, have been found; the most important of these genera are *Sarcorhamphus*, *Cathartes*, *Pavo*, *Ciconia*, and *Mycteria*.

I am, Sirs,

Yours, &c.,

CHAS. W. ANDREWS.

SIRS,—Some interesting remarks by Mr. Dewar in the 'Field' of Nov. 18th, p. 1084, on the aerial speed of one of our commonest British Sandpipers affords a fitting opportunity for considering the proper spelling of its English name. The form "dunlin" adopted by Mr. Dewar is doubtless that which is to be found in most works on British birds; but the question is, looking to the etymology of the name and the oldest form of it, whether this is correct. I venture to think not, and for the following reasons.

The meaning of the name "dunling" is the little dun thing, a diminutive akin to grayling, titling, sauderling,

duckling, and gosling, and this is the spelling to be found in the oldest mention of the name, which occurs in the 'Durham Household Book,' containing the accounts of the Bursar of the Monastery of Durham, A.D. 1530-1534. The price then paid for these little birds, known elsewhere as stint, purre, sand-lark, and ox-bird, was at the rate of 4*d.* a dozen.

In an article on "English Bird Names," published in the 'Field' of Jan. 12th, 1884, I took occasion to refer to what I conceive to be the proper spelling of the name "dunling," and in the second edition of my 'Handbook of British Birds' (1901) I explained more fully the reason for the change. This led to a correspondence with the late Professor Newton, who, with the approbation of Professor Skeat, wrote me that he was convinced of the correctness of my view, and that he should adopt the spelling "dunling" when next he had occasion to mention the species in print. This he accordingly did in his 'Ootheca Wolleyana,' pt. 3, pp. 225-226, a fact which seems to have been generally overlooked. This, I venture to think, should settle the question, for no one will dispute the critical acumen invariably displayed by the late distinguished professor of zoology in all matters ornithological. Those who may feel any hesitation in adopting the more correct spelling will, in order to be consistent, have to consider the logical necessity for dropping the "g" in such names as titling, brambling, grayling, sanderling, duckling, and gosling, thereby providing in each case a veritable cockney termination.

I am, Sirs,

Yours, &c.,

J. E. HARTING.

Edgewood, Weybridge.

SIRS,—In a notice of my paper in the Nov. Zool. (vol. xviii. pp. 1-22) the reviewer has fallen into a serious error in concluding ('Ibis,' October 1911, p. 763) that "Mr. Mathews is ready to adopt 'Brisson's' names".

I can scarcely understand how that was written in face of my statement—"but my main, and to me, unanswerable argument *against* Brisson was that he was non-binomial."

As my arguments appear to have been so misunderstood by the reviewer, I may be allowed to briefly summarize my position in this matter. It is noteworthy that this is a question upon which the leaders of the B. O. U. have, at times, given their opinions in favour of the rejection of the Brissonian genera. I am still convinced of the impropriety of admitting the Brissonian genera, and in this matter I am at one with the leaders of the B. O. U., as the following excerpts will show.

In noticing Dr. Hartert's paper regarding the non-recognition of these names, the reviewer in 'The Ibis' (1903, p. 418) wrote: "It is more logical for binomialists to discard Brisson's nomenclature altogether"; and in a paper in 'The Ibis' (1905, p. 85 *et seqq.*) Dr. Selater wrote (p. 88): "There are, however, some authors who maintain that Brisson, not having been a Binomialist, ought not to be allowed to found genera in a Binomial System. Dr. Hartert is strongly of that opinion (see 'Ibis,' 1903, p. 418), and I, though I have usually followed the lead of my friend and master, Strickland, have always thought that it was a mistake to have made this special exception in favour of Brisson."

Mr. Ogilvie-Grant, of the Bird Department in the British Museum and Editor of the 'Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club,' rejected the Brissonian genera in his volumes of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum.'

Now is the time for the B. O. U. to shew their firmness in dealing with this disturbing factor; and by unanimously approving of the rejection of these illegal Brissonian names, they will bring about a nomenclature that will be more stable than any hitherto employed. There should be no hesitation in this matter, as this has been the most unsettling feature of ornithological nomenclature in recent years. All *unprejudiced* writers who have had to note

them have voiced their disapproval of their recognition. In the *Nov. Zool.* vol. xvii. pp. 492-503, I have pointed out how few alterations are necessary if the Brissonian genera are rejected.

Upon the matter of the nomenclature of the Wheatears and Chats, my reviewer wrote: "We cannot agree with Mr. Mathews's reasoning on this subject. *Motacilla ananthe* was one of the three birds included in his genus *Saxicola* by Bechstein in 1802, and that name has been almost universally applied to the Wheatears ever since that period."

This statement is scarcely correct. I shewed that from 1802 until 1841 *Saxicola* was used for the Chats, and it is from 1841 that it has been misapplied. Dr. Selater will be interested in the following note, written by his "friend and master, Strickland," regarding this very point: "The name *Rubetra*, now first introduced *as a genus* (for the Chats) by Mr. Gray, ought not to supersede the old genus *Saxicola* Bechst. as restricted by Bonaparte" (*Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist.* vol. vi. p. 422, 1841). Unfortunately, in this instance, where he was undoubtedly right, Strickland was not followed, and hence this upset seventy years later.

The only method of dealing with such matters as this is to treat them at once, and in a very short time uniformity of nomenclature will be attained. Thus, the Chats must have a generic name, as *Pratincola* is not available. Then why not use at once the correct name for the genus, *Saxicola*? No other logical course is open, and to try "by a little manipulation" to stave off the change, is a childish method of approaching a difficulty.

I am only interested in the nomenclature of European and American birds so far as members of these Avifaunas straggle to Australia. If I see such glaring errors as those mentioned above go uncorrected, I can have no faith whatever in the nomenclature of any form, and I have to consider each name as absolutely wrong until proven right. Whereas, if I see the errors I come across at once corrected, I can

feel assured that I have a firm basis to work upon, and that if the names be proven wrong it is not due to wilful neglect.

I am, Sirs,
Yours, &c.,

GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

Langley Mount, Watford,
November 18th, 1911.

The Dresser Collection of Birds' Eggs.—Upwards of twelve years ago the Dresser Collection of Birds was transferred to the Museum of the Victoria University of Manchester, and quite recently the Dresser Collection of Palearctic eggs has gone to the same Museum, together with the library of books on ornithology and oology. These collections and the library will be kept together as the “Dresser Collection” and will be restricted to Palearctic Ornithology and Oology.

The egg-collection is especially valuable on account of the extreme care that has been taken to restrict it to eggs which have been carefully authenticated, and most of them have a full history. It contains examples of almost all the eggs yet known of European and Eastern Palearctic species, most of them in good series and in full clutches. The following is a list of some of the rare species which are well represented:—*Turdus dubius*, *T. naumanni*, *T. ruficollis*, *T. varius*, and *T. sibiricus*; *Saxicola albinigra*, *S. pinschi*, and *S. chrysopygia*; *Emberizæ rustica*, *E. pusilla*, and *E. cinerea*; *Podoces panderi* and *P. humilis*; *Calidris arenaria*; *Tringa canutus* and *T. subarquata*; *Numenius tenuirostris*; *Ibidorhynchus struthersi*; *Pagophila eburnea*; *Nema sabinii*, besides ten eggs of *Rhodostethia rosea* which show full variation.

The library contains copies of many rare works, as well as several authors' “own” copies, interleaved with original MS. notes; for instance, the late Dr. Jerdon's own copy of the ‘Birds of India’ with his notes and the last letter he wrote before his death.

The authorities of the Victoria University will not fail, we trust, to appoint a Curator who understands birds and

their eggs to take care of these valuable additions to that institution.

The Bombay Natural History Society.—This well-known Society issues an appeal for £2000 to enable it to procure fresh specimens of the Fauna of British India for its Museum. The services of Mr. Shortridge (late of the New Guinea Expedition of the B.O.U.) have already been secured for two years, but a second collector is much wanted. The Indian Museum at Calcutta is, no doubt, the leading institution of the kind in India, but the great Western Province ought also to have its claims for support duly considered.

The New Guinea Expedition of the B. O. U.—At the meeting of the B. O. C. on Oct. 17th last, Mr. Goodfellow gave a very interesting general statement on the birds observed and collected by the Expedition, after which Mr. A. F. Wollaston made additional remarks about the conditions of travel in the district of New Guinea visited, which appeared to be of the most serious kind (*cf.* Bull. B. O. C., vol. xxix, p. 2). At the following meeting on Nov. 8th (see Bull. B. O. C. vol. xxix, p. 19) the Gaumont Company gave a very successful exhibition of a series of lantern-slides and cinematographic pictures taken by the Members of the Expedition in Central New Guinea. Mr. A. F. R. Wollaston explained the scenes as they were thrown on the screen, and added some interesting observations regarding the manners and customs of the natives.

All the specimens collected have been presented to the British Museum. That they are much appreciated by the Trustees is shown by the following letter, which has been addressed by Mr. Fletcher, the Director of the Museum at South Kensington, to Mr. Ogilvie-Grant, the Secretary of the New Guinea Committee.

“I have had the honour of laying before the Trustees of the British Museum a report of the receipt at the Museum of the valuable collection of zoological specimens from Dutch New Guinea, Amboina, and Aru made by the

Expedition sent out in the year 1909 under the auspices of the British Ornithologists' Union, and presented to the Trustees by the Subscribers to the Expedition Fund.

“The Trustees were informed that the collections received, numbering altogether some 7870 specimens, of which about 2750 are birds and nearly 500 mammals, are of great interest and importance, as coming, for the most part, from a hitherto unexplored portion of a specially interesting locality. They were impressed by the public spirit so generously displayed by the Subscribers to the Fund, and they directed me to request you to convey to the Committee of the Expedition and to all the Subscribers the expression of their special thanks.

“The Trustees would add an assurance of their high appreciation of the work of the members of the Expedition. They recognise that this work entailed very arduous labours on the part of these gentlemen, who underwent considerable hardships in carrying out the mission entrusted to them, the result of which has been to enrich considerably the National Collections.”

The collection of Birds is now being carefully examined under the superintendence of Mr. Ogilvie-Grant, and the results will be published in ‘The Ibis.’

The Passenger Pigeon.—In the new edition of the American ‘Check-list’ it is stated that the celebrated Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), which formerly bred in enormous quantities all over the forests of North America, is “now probably extinct,” and great researches have been made to find some possible survivors of a bird formerly so abundant*. From a recent number of the ‘Zoological Society Bulletin’ (No. 46, p. 781), we learn that the only still living example of this species yet discovered in the United States is a solitary female in the Zoological Garden of Cincinnati, about nineteen years old, so that there is not much prospect of replacing the species in the list of living Birds. On enquiry in Regent’s Park we are informed that

* See above, p. 187.

the last living Passenger Pigeons received by the Zoological Society of London were three examples presented in 1883 by Mr. G. F. J. Thompson. Two of these died in 1884, and the third in 1889.

In September 1856, when the writer was in the forests of Minnesota, the Passenger Pigeon was the most abundant bird for culinary purposes to be found, and many of them were shot and eaten.

There are twenty-one specimens of this Pigeon in the British Museum.

New Work on Migration.—Under the title of “Studies in Bird-Migration,” Messrs. Gurney & Jackson will shortly publish a work by Mr. Eagle Clarke, one of our leading authorities on this important subject. As is well known to most of us, Mr. Eagle Clarke, in pursuit of information required for his task, has undertaken a series of personal investigations at various light-stations round the British coasts, making more or less long stays at the Eddy-stone Lighthouse, the Kentish Knock, the Flannan Isles, Fair Island (between the Orkneys and the Shetlands), and St. Kilda, spending altogether no fewer than fifty weeks in these isolated and remote spots. The results of Mr. Eagle Clarke’s unrivalled experiences are of the most interesting character, and will form a very valuable contribution to the study of “Bird-Migration.”

Death of Mr. R. H. Porter.—We regret to announce the death of Mr. Richard Henry Porter, of 7 Princes Street, Cavendish Square, London, the Publisher of this Journal since 1904. Mr. Porter was well known to many members of the B. O. U., and from his excellent acquaintance with zoological literature was often of great assistance to them. Amongst other works he published Lilford’s ‘British Birds,’ Selater’s ‘Jacamars and Puff-birds,’ Selater and Hudson’s ‘Argentine Ornithology,’ Shelley’s ‘Sun-birds,’ Seebohm’s ‘British Birds,’ Mivart’s ‘Lories,’ and Selater and Thomas’ ‘Book of Antelopes.’ Mr. Porter died on August the 22nd, 1911, at his home in Hanwell, aged 64 years. He is succeeded in his business by his son (Mr. E. A. Porter), who carries it on under the same name.